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Superhero cape maker finds new equipment can be like kryptonite

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Justin Draplin, founder and CEO, Superfly Manufacturing Co.

manufacturing equipment that would allow employees to handle the job more efficiently.

This year, the company bought a cutting table that allows employees to cut hundreds of inches of fabric at time and a fabric spreader that requires only one employee rather than two.

As a result, the company has saved more than 40 hours a week, and the equipment allows the company to process large orders more quickly, Draplin said.

"It's going to save us hundreds of thousands of dollars over the life of the equipment," Draplin said.

In 2008, when **Superfly Manufacturing Co.** was founded, employees made its capes manually. That meant employees had to unroll fabric by hand and cut it with a hand roller that supports only four or five layers of fabric at a time.

"It was highly inefficient and difficult to do," said Justin Draplin, founder and CEO.

Solution: Following the advice of an employee, Superfly invested in new

Superfly Manufacturing Co.

Location: Livonia

Description: Manufacturer for customized superhero capes, plush toys and costumes

Founded: 2008

Employees: 18

Revenue: \$2 million in 2015

Stage 2 Strategies:
Problem to be solved

Superfly Manufacturing Co. began by making customized superhero capes for children by hand. New equipment was bought to make the process more efficient, but without adequate training, workers burned time and fabric.

"We're more efficient and are able to take bigger orders without thinking twice because we can quickly cut a lot of product."

Risk and considerations: Superfly had difficulties learning to use the new equipment.

The commercial cutter burned fabric because it moves quickly, and the core of the fabric was being crushed when the fabric spreader was in use.

For three months, fabric was discarded while the company isolated each individual step, reached out to the manufacturer for advice, and even visited a facility nearby that had similar equipment.

It took about six months for the company to get up to speed, and it lost thousands of dollars, Draplin said.

"It blew my mind as to how many things could go wrong," Draplin said.

Although looking back at the time gives Draplin a headache, he said his biggest regret was not purchasing the equipment sooner.

"Our staff is more productive and able to produce more," he said.

Expert opinion: Jim McTevia, principal of Bingham Farms-based business consulting firm **McTevia & Associates LLC**, said many companies experience this issue.

"No company should acquire a piece of machinery or equipment unless they're familiar with the machinery and have the ability to operate it," he said.

McTevia said companies should research equipment before it's purchased, and see it being operated.

"For any company to buy a piece of equipment and learn how to operate it on the job is called nonrecurring expense. It only happens at the very beginning of the educational process of the piece of machinery — but it could have been alleviated," he said.

Companies should take advantage of training directly from the manufacturer, which is often at no cost to an employer, McTevia said.



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